

## Issue Brief – Obesity Prevention Initiative

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH/COMMUNITY &amp; FAMILY HEALTH SERVICES

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### **SUMMARY**

Most of the building blocks requested by the Department and recommended by the Analyst are a response to health challenges. Though there are some “early intervention” activities, most are not preventative. The health consequences of obesity are both life-threatening and disabling for adults and children. Some of the effects are cardiac arrest, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, some cancers, osteoarthritis, sleep disorders, and more. Addressing obesity could have long-term fiscal impact, both in cost avoidance and direct savings.

### **OBJECTIVE**

The objective of this building block request is to obtain funding support for an initiative to address a growing health problem that leads to increases in Medicaid, Medicare and general health services costs.

### **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

Obesity has increased in Utah. One out of four children grades Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> and 18.3 percent of high school students are overweight or at risk for overweight. Overweight has increased 47 percent in pre-school children, ages 4-5, who are in the WIC program.

In 2004, 21 percent of Utah adults were obese, compared with 10.4 percent in 1989. In a 2002 study, the Centers for Disease Control estimated that Utah spends \$393 million annual on obesity related illness, with \$71 million for Medicaid and \$62 million for Medicare. On average, in 2002, treating an obese person cost \$1,244 more per year than treating a health weight person. Since this report, Utah has gotten heavier.

#### ***Potential Intervention Actions***

The best evidence suggests that the most desirable primary prevention goal is to prevent children with a normal weight from becoming at risk for overweight or overeating. Secondary prevention goals include keeping children at risk for overweight from becoming overweight and treatment of overweight children to the extent possible.

Efforts by the Department could include:

- Expanding the Gold Medal Schools Program to Utah middle schools. This program encourages healthy eating and increased physical activity.
- Expanding a Healthier You Legacy Awards Program for communities, worksites and churches.

- Expand the promotion of breast feeding of infants.
- Develop health care provider interventions.

Efforts will track, report and promote a healthy lifestyle and weight control.

### **LEGISLATIVE ACTION**

#### ***Recommendation***

The Utah Department of Health has started an effort to reduce obesity. This effort should be expanded.

The Analyst recommends that if the Subcommittee would like to fund the Obesity Prevention Initiative, it might consider approval of a building block of up to \$800,000 ongoing General Fund and place it on the Health priority list.

Any funding whether one-time or ongoing could be used productively.